

# New Zealand Today



News via satellite from the world's foremost newswires

## UNION SLAMS CHARTER SCHOOLS

WELLINGTON - National is committing political suicide by agreeing to set up charter schools, a teacher union says.

The post-primary teachers union (PPTA) says they've been "a disastrous experiment" overseas and the government hasn't even reviewed the evidence.

Establishing the schools is part of the support agreement signed on Monday by Prime Minister John Key and ACT's sole MP John Banks.

"There doesn't appear to have been any assessment of the venture's cost or the value of its return either," PPTA president Robin Duff said on Wednesday.

"For National to incorporate another party's such poorly-concocted education policy into its own education portfolio looks like political suicide - the party should know better."

## Two dead after Fiordland crash

WELLINGTON - Two people have died and a third has been seriously injured after their 4WD left the road and crashed down a cliff in Fiordland.

Emergency services were called shortly before 7pm on Wednesday after the vehicle plunged about five metres down a cliff on the Milford side of the Homer Tunnel, Invercargill police Senior Sergeant Dave Raynes said.

Two of the car's occupants died at the scene.

St John ambulance communications spokesman Paul Burns told NZ Newswire a 30-year-old man was airlifted to Invercargill Hospital with "reasonably serious" injuries.

Helicopters, Department of Conservation workers and two doctors assisted emergency services at the scene.

The serious crash unit will begin an investigation on Thursday morning.

## Air NZ gun sacking upheld

WELLINGTON - The aviation industry's sensitivity to threats about guns and bombs means Air New Zealand was justified in sacking an airport worker who joked about a shooting spree.

Shane Clarke took a case to the Employment Relations Authority, seeking reinstatement and compensation after being fired from his job as an aircraft loader at Wellington International Airport - a position he had held for 10 years.

## Ex mine boss admits ignorance

GREYMOUTH - The former Pike River Coal board chairman admitted to the Royal Commission he had not known about safety issues at the mine before it exploded killing 29 men.

"There have been a lot of things come out that I have been horrified at," former chairman John Dow told the inquiry on Wednesday into the Pike River Coal Mine tragedy last year.

It took Mr Dow over four hours to agree at the commission that there had been a failing of safety systems at the West Coast mine.

He had insisted it was working because deputies were filing reports and these were the responsibility of experience site management.

The board did not need to know about the "daily" life of technical issues.

Mr Dow had been shown a series of incidents, including methane sensors covered, bypass switches left on, and a report that raised "great concerns" that there was no management plan for gas outbursts. The board did not know about any.

The board expected to learn of incidents the

following month when the chief executive officer reported, the primary conduit to the board, he said.

Counsel for the families Nicholas Davidson QC suggested the unreported issues were things "that makes hair stand up on end".

He agreed and said had he known he would have intervened.

Mr Davidson pointed out that if the chief executive did not report the incident to the board then it did not know and he was relying on a CEO he had lost confidence in, in May or June 2010.

That CEO, Gordon Ward, resigned in October 2010.

Mr Dow insisted that safety manger Neville Rockhouse should have raised concerns at the health and safety committee as he had been at the mine over four years.

Mr Rockhouse reported to the mine manager, and mine managers had been "churning over" six times in just over two years, Mr Davidson said.

## Lucky escape as plane crashes

WELLINGTON - A pilot of a light plane has had a lucky escape after crashing at New Plymouth Airport.

Emergency services were called to the airport after the plane crashed near the runway shortly after 7pm on Wednesday, a New Plymouth Fire Service spokesman said.

## Abseiler remembers nothing of plunge

WELLINGTON - A young street performer who survived a four-storey fall with just a broken jaw and foot has no recollection of her death-defying plunge.

Mikaela Blayney, 20, slipped from a harness while abseiling the Metro Centre building in Auckland's Aotea Square on Tuesday morning.

She fell 14 metres onto concrete - and admits she's very lucky to be alive.

"I definitely have some guardian angels out there," Ms Blayney said.

She was taking part in a Co Theatre Physical aerial performance in the Random Acts festival.

## Scientists warn over job cuts

AUCKLAND - The axing of nearly 100 Department of Conservation jobs will undermine efforts to save vulnerable native species from extinction, says a group of New Zealand scientists.

In an open letter to Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson, more than 100 conservation biologists and scientists have expressed their dismay at the restructuring and under-resourcing of the department.

## Stars land in Nelson for Hobbit shoot

WELLINGTON - Hollywood star Orlando Bloom has flown into Nelson, where the cast of The Hobbit is filming under a veil of secrecy this week.

Other stars, including Martin Freeman, James Nesbitt and Stephen Fry, are believed to be shooting scenes with director Sir Peter Jackson and a crew of around 400.

A smaller crew spent a week in November filming at Kaohoka Lakes, Mount Owen and the Takaka Hill, the Nelson Mail reports.

## WEATHER

	Min	Max	
Auckland	13	23	sunny
Christchurch	10	14	cloudy
Wellington	13	17	cloudy

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey, will have its world premiere in Wellington in November next year, before a world-wide release on December 13.

## SPORTS NEWS

### V8 Supercars' NZ future looks bleak

AUCKLAND - V8 Supercars chairman Tony Cochrane says he's doing his utmost to try ensure New Zealand stays on the championship calendar after 2012, but doesn't rate his chances of success.

New Zealand has hosted a round since 2001, beginning at Pukekohe in Auckland and then in Hamilton since 2008.

However, next April will mark the last running of the Hamilton 400 and Cochrane says he is realistic about the prospects of shifting the event to another part of the country.

"I don't want to gild the lily and give people a false sense of hope," he told journalists in Auckland on Wednesday.

Cochrane gave a deadline of next May for coming up with a viable alternative and promised there wouldn't be any lack of will on his part to find a solution.

"But right at the moment, I'm dealing with a pretty crappy deck of cards," he said.

### Johns lends Warriors a helping hand

WELLINGTON - Australian rugby league great Andrew Johns is staggered by the potential of some young players at the New Zealand Warriors as he hones their skills this week.

Johns, who has been contracted as a skills coach at the NRL club for the 2012 season, told a function in Auckland the players coming through the ranks could be something special.

"I've been blown away by what I've seen among the young players this week. The potential is immense but I stress it's potential," he said.

"Some of the young guys at the club are, athletically, without peer. They're just so big and really there's no position for a lot of them. It's just a case of give them the ball and let them play."

### KIWIS LOOK TO EXPLOIT HUGHES FLAW

HOBART - New Zealand will try to heap the pressure on out-of-form Australian opening batsman Phillip Hughes as they seek to level the series with victory in the second and final Test starting on Friday.

The heat is off former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting and wicketkeeper Brad Haddin after good performances in the home side's comprehensive nine-wicket victory over the Black Caps in the first Gabba Test.

Ponting hit 78 and Haddin 80 in the first innings after speculation on their Test futures following a run of low scores, but the spotlight has now shifted to left-hander Hughes and his technical flaws outside off-stump.

Hughes has passed 36 just twice in his past 17 Test innings and with all-rounder Shane Watson (hamstring) and Shaun Marsh (back) on track to return from injuries in the Boxing Day Test against India, the opener's position appears vulnerable.

### Hart steps down from Warriors

WELLINGTON - Warriors executive director John Hart has stepped down after seven years of involvement with the team.

In a statement, Hart said he was "very sad" to be leaving, but did not give reasons for his departure.

"We have achieved a lot during my time and whilst I can see there is still more to achieve, I felt now was the right time for me to step down," he said.

"I am very passionate about the Vodafone Warriors and am very proud of where the club stands in the community, and I wish all those involved the very best."

### Spain looking to lap up atmosphere

AUCKLAND - Spain captain Santi Freixa is eagerly anticipating the top-four playoff match against the Black Sticks in hockey's Champions Trophy in Auckland.

The clash is sure to draw a big crowd and, while most of the fans will be roaring on the home side, the atmosphere will be a big motivator for Freixa and his team-mates.

Spain and New Zealand meet on Thursday, having progressed to the medal phase of the tournament from different pools.

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## FINANCIAL NEWS

### NZ SHARES FALL

WELLINGTON - New Zealand shares fell, with trading volumes again dominated by Telecom and network company Chorus following their split.

Rakon fell to a record low and Contact Energy led decliners.

The NZX 50 Index fell 8.444, or 0.3 per cent, to 3283.043. Within the index, 20 stocks fell, 20 rose and 10 were unchanged. Turnover was \$90.6 million. Telecom rose 2 per cent to \$2.03.

The New Zealand dollar rose above 78 US cents ahead of Thursday's Reserve Bank review of monetary policy, where the benchmark interest rate is expected to stay on hold at the record low of 2.5 per cent.

After the Spaniards confirmed their progress from Pool A along with defending champions Australia, Freixa said he hoped they would be joined by New Zealand and the Netherlands.

"I would love to play against New Zealand," he said.

"To have a full stadium - this is what you aim for when you're a sports player. But I also have a lot of friends in the Dutch team and I would also love to play against them."

### Athlete chokes to death

WELLINGTON - The captain of New Zealand's men's netball team choked to death in a freak accident while eating his dinner, reports said on Wednesday.

Mike Siave collapsed in front of his wife Amanda on Friday as he was eating a meal at his Christchurch home, the New Zealand Herald reported.

It said paramedics failed to revive the 35-year-old and a coroner's report found he died of asphyxiation caused by a food blockage in his throat.

Amanda Siave said she and her two sons were still coming to terms with the bizarre death.